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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BUJUMBURA 000798

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL INHOFE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Your visit to Burundi comes at a critical time in the country's modern political history. After a summer marked by political infighting and a virtual legislative standstill, President Nkurunziza appointed a new government and displayed some willingness to tackle Burundi's significant political challenges. Negotiations between the Government of Burundi (GOB) and the lone remaining rebel group, the PALIPEHUTU-FNL (FNL), are set to resume amid a violent fracturing of the rebel group. After years of devastating civil war, the GOB hopes to relinquish its dependence on post-conflict assistance and develop its economy. Endemic corruption and a volatile political environment continue to hamper efforts to make economic progress and ensure stability.

¶2. (SBU) The GOB, with significant U.S., British, French, and African Union (AU) support, is attempting to establish a leadership role for itself in Africa by participating as a Troop Contributing Country to the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). However, cumulative deployment delays may put at risk Burundi's reputation as a reliable international partner. It would be helpful if the CODEL would reinforce the Embassy's message that Burundi needs to deploy its promised peace-keepers immediately. END SUMMARY.

The Peace Process Stalled

¶3. (SBU) In September 2006, President Nkurunziza's government signed a cease-fire agreement with the FNL, the sole remaining rebel group. A critical obstacle to completing the peace process is the recent formation of a group of some 2,000 so-called FNL "dissidents," who claim to be weary of conflict and ready to implement the cease-fire accords; there is some question as to whether all of these troops are actual FNL members. The dissidents are strongly opposed by forces loyal to FNL leader Agathon Rwasa, who appears to be jockeying for position in the run-up to 2010 elections. In September, pro-Rwasa troops attacked a contingent of dissident soldiers near the capital of Bujumbura, leaving at least 20 dead. The dissidents are currently located in two camps north of Bujumbura under the protection of the GOB and the AU. The government and international community are discussing ways to move the process forward without prompting Rwasa to resume full-scale guerrilla war.

Political Stalemate

¶4. (SBU) A political stalemate plagued the Burundi National Assembly over the summer, with the President's fractured National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) unable to unite to pass legislation. However, under sustained pressure from the media, political parties and the international community, the President reached out to the opposition at the end of August to reestablish a dialogue and encourage all parties to work together for the people of Burundi. In November the controversial First Vice President resigned and the President reshuffled his cabinet to allot more ministerial positions to opposition parties. There is some optimism that this new political configuration might be able to move the political agenda forward. The GOB recently nominated Minister of External Relations (the equivalent of Secretary of State) Antoinette Batumubwira to be the next President of the African Union.

AMISOM Deployment Delays

¶5. (SBU) Burundi has pledged to support the AMISOM mission with two battalions of roughly 850 soldiers each. While the AU welcomed this offer from the newly-democratic Burundi, the deployment was initially delayed by the GOB's inability to find financing for equipment and training. The United States and other international partners agreed to provide equipment and training, including a pre-deployment program financed with African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) funds.

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¶6. (SBU) Increased and changing demands from the Forces de Defense National (FDN - the Army), however, have further delayed the planned November 15 deployment. It would be helpful for the CODEL to deliver the strong message that while the U.S. is pleased with Burundi's commitment to AMISOM, its determination to play a leadership role in the region, and the deepening bilateral ties between our two countries, the U.S. strongly urges Burundi to deploy its troops to Somalia immediately. Prior delays notwithstanding, further delays threaten to send an unwanted signal that Burundi may not be ready to act as a reliable international partner.

Regional Security

¶7. (SBU) Burundi is a regional partner in the U.S.-financed and facilitated Tripartite Plus Joint Commission (Tripartite Plus), a group that also includes the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and Uganda. The primary goal of the Tripartite Plus is to reduce the threat of negative forces in the region, primarily in eastern DRC. The GOB values the Tripartite Plus as an essential forum where member governments can voice security concerns and discuss solutions to help ease regional tensions. A Tripartite Plus Heads of State Summit will take place in Addis Ababa on December fifth to take advantage of the momentum of the November Nairobi Agreement between Rwanda and the DRC that calls for a cooperative military plan of action to eliminate negative forces in eastern DRC.

Economic and Social Background

¶8. (SBU) Burundi has the second highest population density in Sub-Saharan Africa, and its 7.4 million people live in an area roughly the size of Maryland. The population is made up of three major ethnic groups - Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa (formerly

known as Pygmy). Although Hutus make up the majority of the population (84 percent), Tutsis (15 percent) have been politically and economically dominant since Belgian colonial rule. A decade-long civil war, the most recent manifestation of inter-ethnic violence since independence in 1962, began in 1993 and displaced approximately one million Burundians and left an estimated 300,000 dead.

¶19. (SBU) Burundi is one of the poorest countries in the world. Per capita GDP is approximately \$119, and Burundi recently ranked 169 out of 177 on the UN's Human Development index. The mainstay of the Burundian economy is agriculture which accounts for almost half of GDP. Approximately 90 percent of the labor force is dependent on subsistence farming, which has been complicated by the large number of refugee returns in 2007 and a rapidly increasing population competing for a limited amount of available land. The main cash crop is coffee, accounting for more than half of exports earnings; other principal exports include tea, sugar and raw cotton. Kirundi is Burundi's primary language; French and Kiswahili are also widely spoken.

Bilateral Economic Relations

¶10. (SBU) After Burundi's 2005 democratic elections, the U.S. lifted sanctions on Burundi pursuant to Section 508 of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act, thus paving the way for the resumption of direct assistance. Burundi also became eligible for tariff preferences under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in December 2005. The African Development Foundation (ADF) has signed an agreement to start operations here and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) has also expressed an interest in operating in Burundi. The U.S. is one of the country's main donors, with over \$46 million in assistance in FY07 and is the single largest donor to the UNHCR and World Food Program in Burundi.

¶11. (SBU) In 2006 and 2007, International Military Education and Training (IMET) monies funded two seminars on civil-military relations for 120 leaders in civil society and

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the security sector, and an English lab and language classes for commissioned officers and NCOs at the army's training center, ISCAM. The Defense Minister hopes this will better equip the Army to participate in regional peacekeeping missions and qualify individual officers for professional military training opportunities in the U.S. Future IMET funds would be used for training in Peacekeeping Operations and the Rule of Law.

USAID

¶12. (SBU) The USAID assistance program addresses three areas critical to Burundi's transition from a post-conflict country to a developing one: developing economic growth by diversifying rural income through agribusiness; improving maternal-child health by educating the public on good hygiene and nutrition; and promoting democracy and good governance. Further, with a rapidly growing population, the return of tens of thousands of refugees, and its position as the second most densely populated country in sub-Saharan Africa, land ownership and land availability will become an increasingly difficult challenge for Burundi. Accordingly, USAID assistance is also focused on finding a resolution to the difficult question of land tenure.

Health and HIV/AIDS

¶13. (SBU) Despite the fact that Burundi's HIV/AIDS problem is as serious as that of its neighbors (six percent of the

population is HIV positive), Burundi is not a PEPFAR country.

Although the U.S. Mission has limited funds to support anti-HIV/AIDS programs and HIV/AIDS education, it supports HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support services in Bujumbura and in Kirundo Province. The AIDS problem facing the military is being addressed through Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) funding administered through the DAO. A multi-year program is in place to educate, test, and counsel AIDS-susceptible military members and their families.

Mission Staffing

¶14. (SBU) The U.S. Mission in Burundi is staffed by 15 direct-hire American employees and six Marines; a two-person Defense Attach Office; one USAID American personal services contractor and 103 locally engaged staff. The Mission is a high hardship, 20% danger pay post and employees operate under strict travel restrictions. Despite these limitations, the security situation has improved sufficiently that in June 2006, the Department of State authorized adult dependents to return to post and is considering a return to fully accompanied status.

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